DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 146 322 CE 008 823

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TITLE Let's Get Together: An Office Education Mini-Manual on Subject-Verb Agreement.
INSTITUTION New Mexico State Dept. of Education, Santa Fe. Office of Vocational-Technical Education.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 34p.; For related documents see CE 008 821-831
AVAILABLE FROM Curriculum Development Unit, New Mexico State Department of Education, Education Building, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503 (set of ten manuals and teacher's guide, $8.50; not available separately)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Objectives; *Business Education; *Business English; *Grammar; Instructional Materials; Learning Activities; Manuals; *Office Occupations Education; Secondary Education; *Syntax; Tests; *Verbs; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS New Mexico

ABSTRACT

One in a series of ten mini-manuals on office communication proofreading, this booklet for business and office students provides instruction in subject-verb agreement. Included are terminal and specific objectives, related grammar rules and definitions, and tasks for practice. A test over the information presented concludes the manual. (Test answers are included in the teacher's manual for the series--CE 008 821.) (BM)

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Let's Get Together

an office education Mini-Manual on SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

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New Mexico State Department of Education

An Office Education Mini Curriculum Manual on
SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

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NEW MEXICO STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
1976

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What you'll find in this booklet

The point of this booklet (TERMINAL OBJECTIVE)	PAGE 1
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THE POINT OF THIS BOOKLET
(i.e., Terminal Objective)

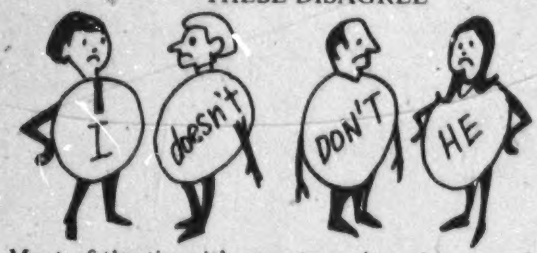
When you are able to show that you know – and can apply – all the rules given in this booklet for subject-verb agreement – that means, when you've studied the objectives, read the INFO pages carefully, done the TASKS successfully, and gotten at least 85 per cent on the TEST at the end – you'll be able to catch errors in subject-verb agreement on almost any job you get.

1st THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

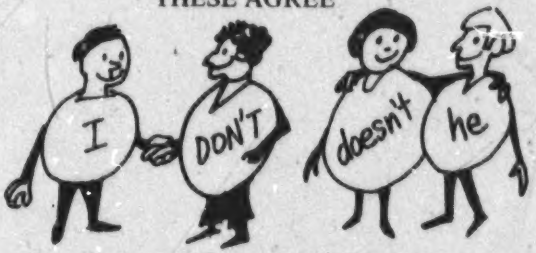
A verb must agree with its subject.

Actually, this is not only the first thing to know – it is really the only thing.

THESE DISAGREE



THESE AGREE



Most of the time it's easy to make subjects and verbs agree. We hardly have to think about it. For example, before you turn the page, choose the verb that sounds best in these four (4) sentences.

1. Suzy and Frank *is/are* at the movie.
2. Frank *doesn't/don't* like movies.
3. It *is/are* too bad he *hate/hates* them.
4. Luckily he *like/likes* Suzy.

OBJECTIVE
OEM2-2

SPECIFICALLY, WHAT YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO DO:
(i.e., Specific Objectives)

When you finish with this booklet, these are the things you'll know, or will be able to do:

1. Complete a given unfinished statement about subject-verb relationship.
2. Match terms involved in agreement rules with their definitions.
3. Identify incorrect subject-verb combinations.
4. Eliminate incorrectness in given sentences containing compound subjects.
5. Eliminate incorrectness in given sentences containing collective nouns.

6. Eliminate incorrectness in given sentences containing fractional expressions.

7. Eliminate incorrectness in given sentences containing certain indefinite pronouns.

8. Identify the controlling subject and the correct verb form in given sentences of inverted or complex word-order.

9. Eliminate incorrectness in given sentences containing subject words that may appear to be of a number other than they are.

10. Eliminate incorrectness in given sentences containing expressions of quantity as subjects.

?
THEY
DOESN'T
JURY
George
BOOKS
SUBJECTS
DON'T
FINDS
are
VERBS

1st THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT, Cont.

See, that wasn't hard. You already know which verb goes with, or agrees with, which subject.

(Correct answers: 1. *are* 2. *doesn't* 3. *is, hates* 4. *likes*)

What you may not know (most people don't) is *why* you're right. And sometimes you run into a sentence where it's not so easy to make verbs agree with subjects. Then you need to know *why* this verb agrees with that subject.

So this booklet is going to give you some other things to know about subject-verb agreement. When you finish, you'll know which verb goes with which subject – you may have to stop and think sometimes, though.

Either Gloria or the Smith sisters _____ riding with Ray.

2nd THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

You have to know at least eight definitions before you can understand the rules

The words you have to know the meanings of before you can really use the rules of subject-verb agreement are: *noun, pronoun, verb, subject, number, person, compound, collective.*

What's a NOUN?

A NOUN is simply what we call something — a person, a place, an object, a quality. Often it's easy to identify a noun. For example: The *team* played a *game* in the *gymnasium.*

The three italicized words are nouns. The first is what we call a group of people who play games in a gym; the second is what we call whatever it was they were playing; and the third is what we call the building in which some games are played.

The order of the words often is a clue to nouns (and verbs and other parts of speech). So are function words like *a* and *the*. And so are word endings like *ed* or *ing.*

Take a deep breath, get ready for a surprise, and turn the page.

. . . more definitions

The orskils toobled a sitrab in the gootballow.

Which ones are NOUNS? Even though you can't know the meaning of the words, the NOUNS are *orbskils*, *sitrab*, and *gootballow*. How do we know? By word order – we're used to having NOUNS in those positions in a sentence. We're used to seeing function-words like *a* and *the* with NOUNS. We're used to having an *s* on the end of a NOUN to make it plural (more than one) or an *ed* on the end of another kind of word (a VERB; see below) to tell us that the action it describes happened in the past.

What's a PRONOUN?

It used to be said that a PRONOUN is a word that takes the place of a NOUN. Sometimes that's true: "Laura did her homework early so *she* could go to the dance."

In that sentence, *she* obviously takes the place of *Laura*, and *she* is indeed a PRONOUN.

BUT: "General Motors' most expensive car is long, low, and luxurious. A Cadillac is the car I want." Here, *Cadillac* takes the place of *GM's most expensive car*. But it's not a PRONOUN; it's a NOUN.

...more definitions

So perhaps a better way to put it is that a PRONOUN is a word which takes the place of a NOUN *and* which would not be clear unless it referred specifically to that NOUN. The NOUN, in turn, is usually in the same sentence or in the sentence preceding (before) the sentence with the PRONOUN.

For example: John likes Julie, but Julie doesn't like John (no PRONOUNS) John likes Julie, but she doesn't like him. (*She* is the PRONOUN referring to Julie; *him* is the PRONOUN referring to John.)

What's a VERB?

A VERB is often a word which tells what action was performed by a NOUN. For example: "The man bit the dog." What action took place? Biting; *bit* is the VERB telling what the NOUN, *man*, did.

Another kind of VERB is called linking (or state of being, or copulative). For example: "The man is unhappy with his hairy teeth." No action is implied here – just a state of being unhappy (with teeth that need combing as well as brushing). So *is* is a linking VERB.

VERBS are often made up of more than one word: "She had been having a toothache for a week." The VERB? *had been having*.

. . . more definitions

What's a SUBJECT?

A SUBJECT is the NOUN or PRONOUN that the sentence is about; it tells who or what performed the action described by the VERB. For example: "The team played a game in the gym." Who played? The team. So *team* is the SUBJECT of the VERB *played*. Commonly the SUBJECT comes *before* the verb. But not always. For example: "Here comes the sun." What action? *Comes*. What comes? The *sun*; not *here*.

What's NUMBER?

As we're using it here, NUMBER refers to whether a NOUN or a VERB is *singular* that is, one and only one – or *plural* – more than one. *Boy* is singular; *boys* is plural. Adding an *s* to a NOUN is the most common way to change a singular NOUN into a plural NOUN. But, strangely enough, adding an *s* to a VERB makes it fit with (agree with) some singular NOUNS. Watch what happens:

Plural	plural	Singular	Singular
Boys	*run*	*Boy*	*runs*

What's PERSON?

That's easy, you think. But, PERSON, here, deals with the kinds of PRONOUNS and the VERBS that go with them. Spend a few minutes memorizing this little table, and it will make several rules easy later:

. . . more definitions

	SINGULAR	*PLURAL*
FIRST PERSON	I	We
SECOND PERSON	You	You
THIRD PERSON	They	They

So much for the PRONOUNS. How about the NOUNS? That's easy. All the NOUNS are third person, some singular (*Mr. Smith*), some plural (*the tables*).

What's a COMPOUND?

A COMPOUND SUBJECT is a subject that has two (or more) parts. For example: "Sylvia and JoAnn ate some green apples." *Sylvia and JoAnn* is a COMPOUND SUBJECT.

Likewise, a COMPOUND VERB is one with two (or more) actions. For example: "The girls ate green apples and moaned in pain." *Ate* and *moaned* form a COMPOUND VERB.

One sentence can have both a COMPOUND SUBJECT and a COMPOUND VERB: "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice sang and danced and forgot their studies." Can you find them all?

What's a COLLECTIVE?

Here, we do not mean a farm in Russia. Here, a COLLECTIVE NOUN is a NOUN that represents a group of persons, animals, or things: *class, jury, herd, company*, for example.

3rd THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Singular subjects take singular verbs, and plural subjects take plural verbs

Most of the time, that's easy. Few people would even think of writing: The man *are* in the car. Or: The men *is* in the car. But sometimes you hear: That guy *don't* listen to anybody. It should be *doesn't*, because *doesn't* is the singular form of the verb that goes with the singular guy.

And sometimes you hear: They *isn't* very nice to their parents. Again, a plural subject, *they*, needs a plural verb, *aren't* (or *are not* in most business correspondence). Let's review the table given earlier, this time with the various forms of the verbs *to be* and *to do*:

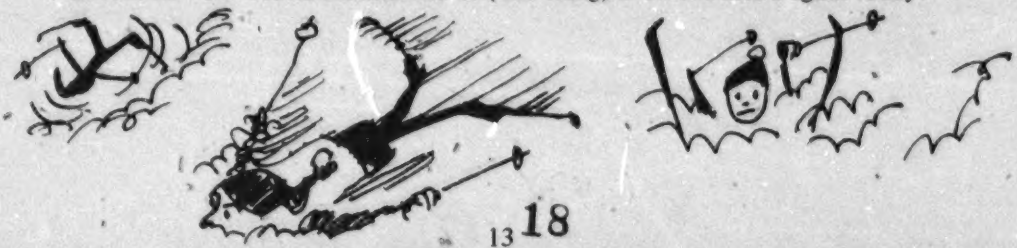
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FIRST PERSON	I am	We are (aren't)
	I do (don't)	We do (don't)
SECOND PERSON	You are (aren't)	You are (aren't)
	You do (don't)	You do (don't)
THIRD PERSON	He, she, or it is (isn't)	They are (aren't)
	He, she, or it does (doesn't)	They do (don't)

Note that *you*, whether singular or plural (one person or more than one), always takes a plural verb.

4th THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

Most compound subjects demand a plural verb

- That's because most compound subjects refer to two or more people or things, so a plural verb is the logical one: "Gloria and Jimmy often *fall* when they ski." Gloria falls. Jimmy falls. (Everyo*n*e falls.) But Gloria and Jimmy (*they*) fall.
- *But some compound subjects take a singular verb.* How can that be? If the two (or more) parts of a compound subject are joined with *or* (or *nor*), it means that only one did whatever the verb says was done. For example: "Gloria or Jimmy *has won* the ski race." We need a singular verb because only *one* of them *has won* the race. Common sense, right?
- Another case in which compound subjects take singular verbs isn't very common, but you should know about it. It happens when the two parts of the subject refer to only one person or thing. For example: "My advisor and friend (one person) *suggests* I stay in school." Or "Macaroni and cheese (one thing) *is* on the menu again today."



4th THING (Continued)

- If both (or all parts of the compound subject joined with *or* (or *nor*) are plural, use a plural verb. For example: "Neither the girls nor the boys *are* celebrating."
- But what if one part of the compound subject joined with *or* (or *nor*) is singular and the other part is plural? Simple. Make the verb agree with whichever subject is nearer: "Either *Gloria* or the *Smith sisters are* riding with Ray." "Either the *Smith sisters* or *Gloria is* riding with Ray."

  (This last example is "correct" but not good writing. A good writer would probably put Gloria first and the Smith sisters next to the verb so that the plural form could be used; After all, we're talking about several people, so a plural verb is the logical form to use if possible.)
- Pronouns joined by *or* (or *nor*) may require two different verb forms. For example: "Either she is leaving or I am. (Not: *Either she or I is leaving*; and not *either she or I am leaving*.)

5th THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

You must know whether a collective noun means "one" or "several" to find the right agreement

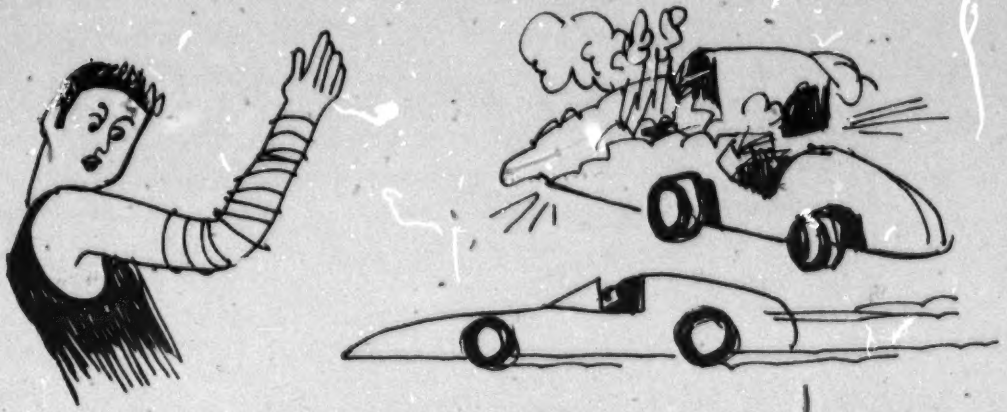
- Here's an example of a collective noun thought of as singular: "The committee *has* decided to open its books to the IRS." There may be several people on the committee, but the committee is acting as "one." So it makes sense that both the verb and the pronoun referring to the committee, *its*, are singular.
- Here's another: "The jury *finds* the defendant innocent." "Jury" is "one"; verb is singular.
- But here's an example in which the collective noun has a plural sense: "The committee *are* disagreeing as to their next report." The people on the committee are disagreeing; they are not acting as "one," so both the verb and the pronoun, *their*, are plural.))
- Here's another of the same sort: "The jury *are* divided over the verdict." Note, in both these examples, that the sense of the sentence is that the group is not acting as one unit, so a plural is necessary.
- Note, too, that both sentences would probably sound better if we wrote: "The members of the committee are disagreeing" and "The members of the jury are . . ."
- When in doubt about a collective noun, use a singular verb.

6th THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

Fractional expressions take a singular verb if they refer to one item; a plural if they refer to several

Three-fourths of my arm was injured. (One arm; so singular verb *was*.)

Two-thirds of the cars were wrecked. (Several cars; so plural verb, *were*.)



7th THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

Some indefinite pronouns are always singular, some are always plural, and some can be either singular or plural

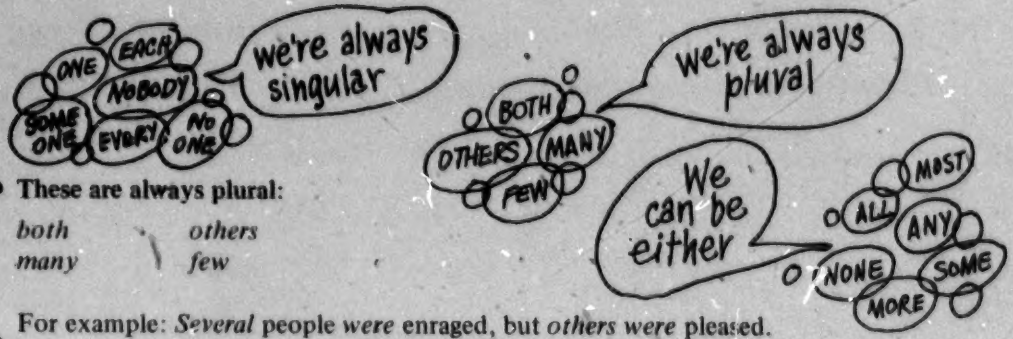
There's nothing to do here but memorize:

- **These are always singular:**

Each	*Anybody*	*Everybody*	*Nobody*	*Somebody*
Every	*Anything*	*Everything*	*Nothing*	*Something*
Either	*Anyone*	*Everyone*	*No one*	*Someone*
Neither	*Any one*	*Every one*		*Some one*
One				
Another				

For example: "*Every* child *has* problems." "*Each needs* help in solving them." "*One has* to be patient." "*Everyone is* going to the party; *something tells* me it will be lots of fun."

7th THING (Continued)



- **These are always plural:**

both	*others*
many	*few*

For example: *Several* people *were* enraged, but *others were* pleased.

- **Now for the hard part – some indefinites can be either singular or plural.** It depends on the noun they refer to:

all	*any*	*more*
none	*some*	*most*

For example: *All* the food *is* gone. (*Food* is singular.) *All* the cookies *were* eaten. (*Cookies* is plural.)

8th THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

Subjects and verbs must agree no matter where they're located in the sentence

- Here is a sentence from a technical report. Note that the subject and its verb are separated from each other and that the noun nearest the verb is plural. But the subject *interaction* is singular, so the singular verb *needs* is necessary:

  "The complex interaction between man, his by-products, and sensitive eco-systems needs to be examined."

  (If you would have written *need*, don't feel bad; the writer of the report used *need*, too. A secretary proofreading it corrected it.)

- Here's another: "The *reporter*, as well as the 9,461 people at the concert, *was* impressed."

- When the verb comes before the subject, we call it an *inverted* sentence: "Attached *are* two carbon *copies*." OR "Enclosed *is* the original *letter*."

- A common kind of inverted sentence is one which begins with *There* or *Here*. The choice of verb depends on the subject, not on the adverb (here or there). For example: "There *is* the great *love* of my life. But here *are* two *others* who come pretty close."

9th THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:

Some subject-verb problems are special cases – they don't fit into any of the earlier groups

- **Some nouns look plural and aren't** – *news, economics, mathematics,* and *physics,* for example. Each of them is singular.
- **Other nouns look plural and are.** And they have no singular form. For example, *proceeds, goods, scissors.*
- **Still others don't look plural, but they are.** For example: *media* (singular form: medium); *criteria* (singular form: criterion).
- **"Series" can be either singular or plural.** depending on whether you're talking about *one series* or *two series* or more.
- **Sometimes phrases or clauses, instead of nouns, serve as subjects of verbs.** They're almost always singular. Here are some examples:

  "Cleaning the house *is* not my favorite weekend entertainment."
  "Whether my choice was right or wrong *is* not the question."
  "What this country needs *is* a good fifty cent cigar."

  Here's the exception: when a "what clause" refers to a plural concept, use a plural verb.

  "What this country needs *are* cigars from Havana.

10th THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT:
Some subject-verb agreement problems are just plain tricky

Master these and you're one of the few who get (not gets) them right.

- *Data* always used to be plural; today it's most commonly singular. Check with your supervisor, teacher, or someone else who knows the local custom before using it with a verb.
- When the subject is *The number*, use a singular verb; when it's *A number*, use a plural. For example: "The number of people who can't make verbs agree with subjects *is* large." "A number of agreement problems *are* simple."
- Periods of time, amounts of money, or quantities may be either singular or plural, depending upon whether the subject refers to a total amount or to a number of individual units.

  For example:

  "Six months *is* a long time to date someone without holding hands." ("Six months" is one total amount of time.)
  "Six months *have* gone by since anyone held my hand." ("Six months" is the number of individual months involved.)
  "One thousand acres *is* thought to be a small farm out here."
  "One thousand acres *were* planted to alfalfa last spring."

10th THING (Continued)

Most *one of* sentences are easy. They're obviously singular. For example: One of my teeth *is* loose. One of the reasons for loose teeth *is* getting in front of a fist.

But this construction is harder. Most, but not all, authorities favor a plural verb with phrases like *"one of those who"* or *"one of the things that."* For example:

"She is one of those who *do* not believe in the tooth fairy." (Think of it this way: "Of those who do not believe in the tooth fairy, she is one."

"One of the things that bother the tooth fairy *is* looking for teeth in wastebaskets." (OR "Of the things that bother the tooth fairy, one is looking . . .")

Tasks for Practice

TASK 1 – Make a Test

Construct a test on subject-verb agreement. Make up at least two examples for each of the eight areas covered (3rd through 10th objectives); provide a singular and a plural choice of verb in each example. On a separate sheet, make up an answer key. Your examples should look like this:

1. One of the hard parts is/are the waiting.

Each answer in your answer key should look like this:

1. is (10th objective)

TASK 2 – Find the Subject, Supply the Verb

In each of the sentences below, place the capital letter that precedes each verb choice above the subject (or subjects), which controls the verb. Then cross out the wrong verb (and pronoun, if necessary).

1. Our basketball team (A.) is/are popular.
2. The team (B.) has/have recently received new uniforms.
3. There (C.) is/are many students who never miss a game.
4. Shirley is one of those students who (D.) attend/attends every game.
5. Neither Shirley nor her friends (E.) seem/seems to like any of the individual players.
6. One-third of the players (F.) is/are in classes with Shirley.
7. One-half of last week's game (G.) was/were very exciting.
8. A number of players (H.) was/were able to score in double figures.

9. Everyone who knows the players (J.) was/were very excited and leaped to (K.) his/his or her feet.

10. Several people in the crowd kept their seats, but few (L.) was/were thinking of leaving the gym.

11. All of them (M.) was/were upset when some of the officiating (N.) was/were lousy.

12. The roar of the crowd, the coaches, and the players, coupled with the gymnasium's poor acoustics and the shouts of the peanut vendors, (O.) was/were enough to make hearing impossible.

13. Found after the game among the scraps of paper, soft drink cups, and articles of clothing under the bleachers (P.) was/were Shirley.

The Test

(for Objective 1 through 10)

For Objective 1 – State briefly the relationship that a subject and its verb should have.

For Objective 2 – Match:

____ a.	Subject	(1)	Takes the place of a noun.
____ b.	Noun	(2)	Tells what action or state of being.
____ c.	Verb	(3)	Refers to a word's being singular or plural
____ d.	Pronoun	(4)	Has two or more parts.
____ e.	Collective	(5)	A noun that represents a group.
____ f.	Compound	(6)	Divided into first, second, and third.
____ g.	Number	(7)	The noun that performs the action described by the verb.
____ h.	Person	(8)	What we call something.

For Objective 3 – Circle the subject-verb combinations which should not be used:

It don't; They don't; I don't; You (one person) *are; Women runs; Man don't care; You* (several people) *aren't.*

For Objective 4 – Cross out the incorrect verb form in these sentences with compound subjects:

1. Gene or Jack is/are going skating.
2. Neither Gene nor his friends is/are good skaters.
3. Gene's companion and cousin was/were planning to go; his name is Martin.
4. Both Jack and Gene enjoy/enjoys skating.
5. Do/Does Jack or Gene have new skates?
6. Do/Does Jack and Gene sharpen the blades?

For Objective 5 – Cross out the incorrect verb form(s) in these sentences with collective nouns:

1. The soccer team has/have won 37 games in a row.
2. The crowd at the games applaud/applauds them.
3. The audience has/have sometimes fought over the best seats.
4. But the members of the team use/uses their heads and stay/stays cool.

L

For Objective 6 – Cross out the incorrect verb in these sentences with fractional expressions:

1. Two-thirds of the hogs was/were sent to market.
2. One-half of the truck was/were filled with hogs.
3. The other half was/were empty.

For Objective 7 – Cross out the incorrect verb (and pronoun):

1. When each get/gets his/their own way, everyone lose/loses.
2. Everyone who is/are anyone knows that many is/are called but few is/are chosen.
3. Some of the pigs was/were rejected, but most was/were not.
4. Any of their meat is/are going to be high quality.
5. All the meatpackers has/have a warm spot reserved for pigs.

For Objective 8 – Cross out the incorrect verb and underline the subject controlling the correct one:

1. There beside the road that leads from the farms to the markets stand/stands Carl.
2. Carl, who has taken it upon himself to count each pig as it travels by him, count/counts their legs and divide/divides by 4.3 because he sometimes count/counts tails, too.
3. There is/are not many people who are patient with Carl.

For Objective 9 – Cross out the incorrect verb:

1. No news is/are good news.
2. A concert series was/were offered to all students.
3. Mathematics keeps/keep most students from attending.
4. The proceeds from the series go/goes to the activity fund.
5. Last year two series was/were offered.
6. Whether the students attended or not was/were up to them.
7. What the students need is/are an acid rock series and a lecture series.

For Objective 10 – Cross out the incorrect verb:

1. Ten dollars is/are a lot to pay for a cheeseburger.
2. The number of cheeseburgers I eat has/have been reduced.
3. I am one of those who is/are going to starve if prices keep rising.
4. One of the things I would do is/are to buy my own pig.